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*150 Third Street, Suite 129  
Baton Rouge, LA 70801-1389  
Phone (225) 342-4253  
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[www.regents.state.la.us](http://www.regents.state.la.us)*

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## **HIGHER ED AND STATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STAFF TO WORK CLOSER TO MOVE STATE AHEAD**

**BATON ROUGE** – Officials from the Louisiana Board of Regents and the state Department of Economic Development recently met to explore how the state's higher education system can work more effectively with economic development officials to expand the state's economy and attract new industries.

"Postsecondary education is undergoing major reforms in Louisiana," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "But none are more important than the new master plan for public postsecondary education that the Regents recently adopted. It sets clear objectives for accountability, relevance and connection to our communities. At the foundation of the plan is the realization that we cannot have economic development unless we have an educated workforce. Higher education wants to be a full partner in our state's economic development efforts."

Don Hutchinson, secretary of the Department of Economic Development, described the meeting between the two staffs as a "historic moment." He agreed with Savoie's comments, stating that economic development had "to be a partnership between higher education, business and government" in order to successfully diversify Louisiana's economy.

During the meeting, both agencies described what they were doing to further to aid business and industry in the state, either directly or through business incubation research. Regents' staff described a number of initiatives and programs that are targeted at workforce training and economic development. They include the creation of the new Louisiana Community and Technical College System, the Regents' new statewide distance learning network, the new on-line program that evaluates technical college training programs, statewide participation on Workforce Investment Boards, creation of regional coordinating councils that will include education and community leaders, a new campus experts database and state and federal grant programs that finance university-based research that can be transferred to private industry.

Hutchinson described how his department has reorganized its economic development efforts around eight clusters – oil and gas; medical, biotechnology/biomedical; information technology; petrochemical and environmental technology; agriculture, forest and food products technology; transportation; entertainment; micromanufacturing; and advanced materials.

"Postsecondary education has a major role in assisting us as we concentrate on attracting fast growing industries with high paying jobs," Hutchinson said. "Higher Education drives

economic development around the world.” The secretary and other staff members also said they are reassuring out-of-state industries interested in locating in Louisiana that education in the state is improving at all levels.

“No state is doing as much as we are in improving education in Louisiana,” Savoie said. “And we are now beginning to see results. We know that graduation rates are going up, remediation is down and ACT scores are going up. Louisiana is one of only two or three states that have shown a steady increase in ACT scores. Good things are happening in Louisiana education. We’re now considered one of the states to watch.”

Regents and the Department of Economic Development will continue collaborative efforts to address areas where the state can be more competitive, to promote university-based innovations for industry and to work on marketing efforts designed to promote the state’s business and education to companies considering a move to Louisiana.

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